

The Nocturne Issue

Fall 2023

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Journal of Creative Writing and Art

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Table of Contents

Into the Corona	1
Paradoxes	3
Beauty Deserves Vengeance	5
haunted.	6
Smoke	7
Mind Loop	8
Junebug	9
Blueberry	10
For Cats and Kings	11
Contented	12
TICK TOCK	13
2 steps	15
Black Lamb	16
Algorithmic Labyrinth	17
Death Will Not Do Us Part	18
Gentle Until the End	20
Shattered	21
The Curtain	26
Perhaps this wasn't real: an ode to giggling ghosts	27
Koi no yokan	29
Who could []	30
Heartache	31
Doomed	32
UNSHATTERED	33
Her Eyes	34
Think of the children	35
Girlfriends	37
HELP!	38

To Carry her Lie	39
Twisted Sister	40
HOLLYWOOD HOTSHOTS	42
Trap of When	44
Solar Solace	46
Consent	47
Chandrasekhar limit	48
Raccoon Near Spanish Moss	49
Reminisce	50
Whale	52
A Keen Eye	53
TRAPPED	54
Evergreen	56
My Prodigal Mother	57
Crash	58
Forest from the Trees	59
Meditations After Rain	60
No Cage of Clemency	61
Echoes of Identity	62
Reunited apart	63
Compass	65
Life isn't a fairytale	66
Wishing Blue	68
I am poem	69
Get out	70
Las nubes tampoco alcanzarán el sol	72
Sons of the Mourning	73
All I Know	74
Ladies of Bath	75
N.Y.O.	77

Khrysos as Anchurus Recounts (For Alex Murdaugh)	79
Deserved Damnation	80
Frigid	81
Victor's Legacy	82
After Watching Resnais's Night and Fog	84
Better Than Your Lawn	86
Flowerbed Love Songs	87
Rotting peaches under the summer sun: the night you almost died	88
resume	90
La Terreur Cramoisie	91
Waiting to Come Home	92
hhi	93
red	96
Foxgloves	97
The Smoker	99
Departure.	100
Plaques	101
One Night	102
Secrets	104
Toast	105
A Letter to a Girl	107
Are You Coming Home for Christmas?	109
Wright Family Park.	110
See you later	113
Danger in Dawn	115
Throwing it all away for Ecstasy	116
Letter I Received From a Friend On May 15, 2023 at 2:49 p.m.	117
Contributor Bios	121

About <i>The Pen</i>	127
About the Society of Creative Writers	128
Submissions Guidelines	129

In honor of the Nocturne Issue that our contributors created within these pages and the conviction that we hope this issue incites in our readers, our staff has composed an Exquisite Corpse to serve as this issue's Manifesto:

Nocturne

Darkness defined
Through a shimmering night of relentless delight
Emerald candlelight throws flames down to water
Sparse affirmations, ripe with despair
Bathed in the hues' enigmatic light
Walk deftly into the waning gloam
The ring of the moon signs a candle vigil
An owl with a broken neck

Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

I find my best ideas come to me after sunset, and I think many of my fellow writers share the same sentiment. There's just something therapeutic about sitting to your desk in dim light, when the world is asleep, and writing to the depths of your consciousness for hours and hours on end, accompanied by your favorite movie soundtracks and tea turned cold, until you realize you too are human and must inevitably shut your eyes if you wish to remain sane. Before you know it, you've fallen asleep, face to paper and wood, only to awaken the next morning to some of your best work... and thirty minutes late to class or work or your knitting circle.

This is the theme we're paying tribute to within the pages of this semester's issue of *The Pen*, which we've lovingly decided to call The Nocturne Issue. It's an ode to all the wonderful possibilities that nightfall brings, both artistically and not.

Thank you, reader, for picking up this semester's issue of *The Pen*; the dedication that goes into creating these biannual issues is worth it knowing that you find joy in the creative work of both current students and alumni of USCB.

Thank you so much to our Assistant Editor, Chad Merritt, as well as the entirety of our Editorial

Board, including Elizabeth Blanchard, Jackson Cox, Logan Murray, Rebecca Taliaferro, Hope Taylor, and Katie Tovar. You all make my job as Editor that much easier and enjoyable because I have you as my team. This issue wouldn't be here without you.

Thank you to our fearless leader, Dr. Malphrus, for encouraging and guiding us through this process every semester. You are an inspiration and motivator, and we wouldn't be able to assemble these issues without you.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue their creative writing and artwork; you all make up the wonderful body of this issue and I hope you're proud of yourself.

Lastly, thank you to those whose work didn't get in this semester. Please keep creating. Your work is beautiful and important and meaningful, and I hope you resubmit next semester.

Write on.

Sophia McKeehan
Editor

Advisor's Letter

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *The Pen*'s Nocturne Issue. Beginning with the cover, you are invited to enter a world that will evoke the fluttering dreamscapes of creativity. Here you will find dark and pensive pieces, as well as more tender renditions of the human experience—all of it reminiscent of Chopin's revered nocturnal notes. Night is always with us, isn't it—just as the light is endlessly with us as well—for somewhere the dark side of the moon is forever spinning.

Once again, in the course of three incredibly busy months, thin air has been magically transformed into this impressive book you hold in your hands. That magic, however, didn't happen with the wave of a wand. It happened with the tireless dedication and devoted leadership of Editor Sophia McKeehan and the abundantly talented staff she has worked alongside: Elizabeth Blanchard, Jackson Cox, Chad Merritt, Logan Murray, Rebecca Taliaferro, Hope Taylor, and Katie Tovar. They're smart; they're talented; and rest assured, they have burned the nocturnal oil as they diligently labored to bring this extraordinary journal to you, dear reader. Within its pages are the hearts and souls of these fabulous student editors, along with the hearts and souls of the creative writers and visual artists whose work is

included in this issue. I'm grateful to each of them,
and I'm abundantly rewarded in my service as their
faculty director.

Onward!

Dr. Ellen Malphrus
Professor of English
USCB Writer in Residence
Faculty Sponsor for *The Pen* and the Society of
Creative Writers

Into the Corona

Kagome N.Y.

Ring, Ring
Ring goes the phone
Calling a man who is all alone
Alone in this world, or so he was told
Until the world split and began to unfold

Endless expanse in the cardinal direction
Endless elsewhere escaping dissection
Thoughts abstained, confusion reigns
He requested a name
A name to blame

Hours would pass
From sand to glass
With nothing to answer
For there's nothing to ask

And with no need to talk
Onwards shall he walk
Along the pathways
Painted with chalk

Nowhere
Who's there?
Who's right?
Who's fair?

Don't rue

What's true
For now
There's
Only

You

Paradoxes

A. Miller

You are a contradiction onto yourself
In which your own upbringing
Brings

 You

 To

 C o l l a p s e .

You say you are mine

 And you make me yours

But your movement is one fluid motion;
An all in one package of sacrifice and possession.

You welcome me into your home

 By which you mean my home

Because to make myself at home would mean

To forget that you are here

To mak e a mes s

And leave it in disarray

when I am to say~ *goodbye*

And leave its doorway

And isn't that what you mean when you say~

Make yourself at home

You mean : make yourself *me* at home.

My dear, let's be honest

Your invitation is a performance

Your friendliness

 Is unkindliness

Your peace

 Is a war

Your extension of charity
Is something I cannot afford
All these contradictions make me in debt to you
Unrest within my skin
So I'd rather be (a lone) and less
Then give up ~~more~~ for **more**.

Beauty Deserves Vengeance

Jackson Cox

Assuage the heart, façade precedes fatigue
Dethrone your doubts, devoid of dull intrigue

Adored o she, her whimsical dement
So full of light, love truly never spent

Against the grain, adroit forewarning page
Disdain abound, a soul diseased by rage

A faux taboo, grotesque exploring pain
Seduced by words, bizarre dilutes the sane

haunted.

Graceyn Yonce

Glancing at an empty
Passenger seat,
Asking the ghost of
You, “where would you
Like to go today?”
Driving, feeling
Almost nothing, to
A park. Walking to
The tree we read under
Together, the knots
Of magnolia stretching
Out, yawning. Those
Were the days I could
Still reach out to you.
In the end, this memory
Is one of so many—
I want to clutch
Them to my chest,
Hold them closely forever.
We called last week
To trade updates,
One-for-one.
Tomorrow, we’ll meet
For coffee.
Me, with my eyes
Wide and green and
unforgiving, you,
Eyes of buried fire
and dreams yet unheard

Smoke

Hope Taylor

Wrapped around my throat
Holding tighter and tighter
As my vision grows blurred
Temperature rising
Flames growing bigger

Nowhere to turn
Nothing to do
No escape from this or you
Banging on the door I cannot open
Screaming and begging for help
Only to go unheard
Fading into oblivion

There should have been warning signs
Hazard ahead

Slowly suffocating
Painfully
Exhaustingly
False hope
Misguided
Love isn't what they say it is
It's a smoke
Taking my very
Last
Breath

Mind loop

Katie Tovar

I am stupid

I am unworthy

I am unintelligent

That is just not true.

I am smart

I am worthy and intelligent

I mean have you met me?

I am always on some new concept that appeals to me

I am always thinking about others.

I think of the conversations with people

That they say I am smart

That they can tell I care.

I am a good person.

There isn't a sinking feeling.

None at all.

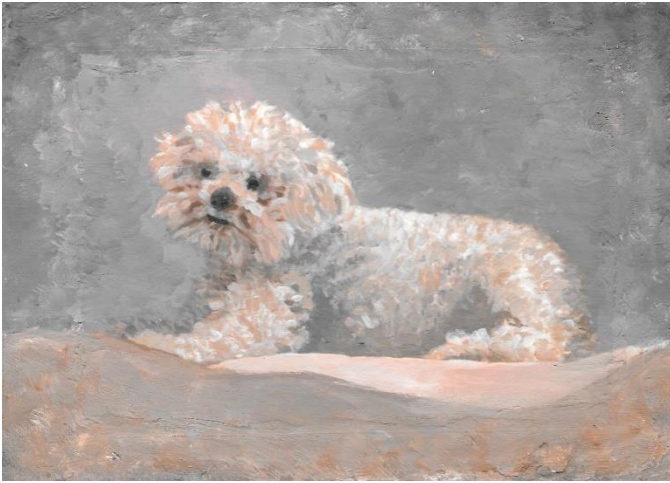
That when I ask for more help that I am a burden,

That when I need it said twice, I am a failure.

That when I don't understand something I—

(Go back to the beginning, try again.)

(No really go back this time and try again.)



Junebug

Jen McCarty

Medium: acrylic on canvas – 5x7”

Blueberry

Alex Clark

Small as my palm;
Asleep— peaceful.

I scooped you up,
Close to my chest.
Introduced the warmth of the house.

Your mother kept you safe.
She trusted me
To watch you grow.

Your white tufted face,
And curious heart
Wiggled into my lap.

You lit up when you saw me,
And lay in my arms
Like a sweet little blueberry bouquet.

And then one day,
You grew up.

Still, I smile
When I hear you purr in my lap,
Asleep— peaceful.

These moments remind me
To cherish the day you were found
Under the branches of that blueberry bush.

For Cats and Kings:

Graceyn Yonce

Sunshine in harvest,
Wind in flame.
Hair like fields of wheat,
Fingers outstretched
Like a feline prepared
To pounce. Each
Moment captured,
Unforgotten. The
Wild, untamed attempt
Of normalcy in an
Unkempt kingdom
Unfit for anything but:
Bountiful harvest
Of sunshine, bright
Wheat of hair, wading
In water falling
From the trees,
And a secret acknowledgement
Of nature's watchful eye.

Contented

Sophia McKeehan

I am a warm mug of raspberry tea
I am a book with a golden spine
I am a safflower growing on the forest's edge
I am a temperate late winter's morning
I am a wooden fountain pen
I am a dark blue midnight sky
I am a cat sitting on the kitchen counter
I am a storm on the beach
A beautiful irony.

TICK TOCK

Debi Boccanfuso

11:27

Why can't I fall asleep?

I never go to bed by 10, but tonight I was just so tired.

But here I am an hour and a half later!

Maybe it's my pillow.

That's better.

12:15

Ugh. I'll be up in 5 hours.

Busy day tomorrow.

Swim class, Vinnie's game, drop a check to Wendy, dinner at Mom's.

Gotta go to Food Lion for fresh bread!

1:24

Why is my phone lighting up?

Don't look. Don't look.

DON'T LOOK!

Keep your eyes closed!

Don't look.

Oh, let me take a quick look!

"Your available account balance is low"

Good ol' Bank of America.

No shit!

3:07

Did I sleep?

I'm not sure, my eyes are closed but did I sleep?

Should I get up to pee?

Damn it.

3:10

I need to sleep.

Is the ceiling fan on? I feel stuffy.

These covers are heavy! My leg is hot!

That should help.

3:12

I should be sleeping.

Did I pick up more strawberry jam for Dad? I'll have to check in the morning.

My arm is tingling. At least that part of me is asleep.

I need to roll over.

Argh! Is it morning yet?

Almost!

3:37

I've got to sleep!

It's Kevin's birthday next week.

How is he 31 already?

I have to send a card.

Where did those years go?

Why is this night not going?

4:02

My alarm will be going off in 2 hours.

Two freaking hours!

Why can't I just fall asleep?

2 steps

A. Miller

I wish I didn't have to beg you to be safe when you go to a celebration of your own community. It should be your day, unaffected and unimpeded. Lord knows you get so little for yourself. But there is a small strong army of those who hate us lurking in the background. And while I want to laugh because they only know how to express themselves through childish wrath, in the body of grown adults, this anger is frustratingly destructive.

I feel like the closer we get to achieving that freedom, time slips back into a loop. They're trying to call back to the good ol' days, puncturing holes and bullet wounds in the stream moving forward in hopes that they can somehow deflate it and roll the timeline back, collapsing and reshaping it entirely into their hands of overabundant control.

How do I reach you three steps forward when I'm already two steps back?

Black Lamb

A. Miller

Middle child
Only sister
Father's favorite
and lonely sinner

I thought I was being Esther
Turns out I was Eve
Picking the knowledge off the tree
To share before that snake sunk in its teeth

Wish my brothers had warned
Me of the road in which I tread
The holes in the road
the thorns on my head

Strap your sins to my hide
And send me out to slaughter
You've been purified of all your sins
But the murder of your only daughter

Algorithmic Labrinth

Jackson Cox

Devout to your machine, corrupt rewards
Succumbing drone, baptized in burning screens
Impulse control exchanged for scrolling feeds
Content monsoons engulf the minds design

Nature is gone, cybernetic decay

Exchange your flesh, delete enslaving chains
Augment yourself, mechanical transplants
Embrace the calls of plastic hearts embalmed
Pollute the skin with chrome, encode the soul

Death Will Not Do Us Part

Gracie Laseter

Till the beetles fill our rib cages
And
Maggots swim through our eye sockets
Devouring our scleras
Slowly
Tunneling through our sinuses
And
All that remains
Is the whisper
Of a memory
Of who we were
The sweet nothings you spoke
Will surround my soul
Accompanying me into the afterlife

Till the vultures swarm,
Circling over
Our gaping skulls
Tasting fading thoughts.
With each piece of cerebrum
Choked down
I will
Keep the memories of us
Safe
In my heart

Till we're submerged in the earth
6ft under our lives

I hope
Our decomposing hands
Find their way to each other
So
Our bare phalanges
May interlock
And
The comfort of your touch
Can reach me
Even in death.



Gentle Until the End

Lessle Rodriguez

Medium: graphite on paper – 17x14”

Shattered

Oriana Bolds

An alarm rang through the darkly lit room, stirring Naheida awake. After fumbling for her phone and silencing the alarm, she switched on the table lamp. A familiar pain radiates from her lower back as she rolls out of bed gingerly. She sits upright momentarily, swaying back and forth, taking in her surroundings. Clothes were strewn everywhere, remnants of lost motivation. Her room was in utter disarray. Her jaw tightens at the sight before relaxing it and tossing her head back. She had accepted that no matter how early she rose, there never seemed to be enough hours in the day. Naheida rose from the bed and chuckled mirthlessly before heading into the shower. The water was as cold as possible— something she had chosen to do after recent events and a compelling wellness blog post. Her breath caught in her throat as the droplets danced across her skin. She hated it at first, but now it's the only thing that jolts her awake.

As Naheida's body reacted to the temperature, another alarm sounded— she was running behind schedule. She rushed to rinse the remaining suds off of her before hastily putting on some clothes left on the floor. She silently crept down the hall. Diego was still sleeping, well, at least she hoped he was. The temptation to check up on home caused Naheida to hesitate, but she

decided against it. She knows he needs space. As she descended the stairs and into the kitchen, she strides towards the refrigerator, pulling out ingredients for breakfast. She cooks silently, letting her thoughts roam as she chopped, diced, and flipped away. She works quicker; this way, there are no distractions. But something feels off. Naheida brushes off the feeling with a sigh, continuing to cook until she hears footsteps coming down the stairs.

“Good morning, Diego— you’re up early.” Naheida turns to Diego, a smile plastered on her face. It didn’t quite reach her eyes, but she hoped Diego wouldn’t notice.

“Of course I am; I have school,” Diego nonchalantly replied, hoisting his backpack higher.

“Right, I know that it’s just...” Naheida cuts her sentence short, not wanting to make this more uncomfortable. “I made you breakfast.” Naheida switching topics.

“I’m not—” Diego starts but is quickly cut off by Naheida.

“Before you say you’re not hungry, let me show you.” Naheida turns away from Diego and fetches a few small plates. “Your grandpa told me last night that these were all of your favorites, and

he said these were all of your favorites,” she says before placing several dishes before Diego.

“I made you toast with tomato and olive oil, an almond croissant from a lovely bakery in town, and Naheida turned her back to Diego, grabbing a huge plate and placing it on the table. “Pincho De Tortilla!” She exclaimed, her eyes bright and excited. She knows that Diego is having a hard time being away from home; she only wants him to be happy here.

“I’m not hungry.” Diego softly replied.

Naheida looked at him sympathetically.

“Look, Diego, I know this is all new; if it makes you feel any better, this is new for me too. I know it’s been a lot, and I never thought I would be in this position alone.”

She reaches towards Diego’s shoulder, resting her hand reassuringly on his shoulder.

“But I know you’re trying. And I appreciate your effort.” Naheida says tenderly.

After a beat, Diego steps back from her and nods slowly. “Mrs. Martin, I must leave to get to school on time.” He pauses and glances out the window.

“It’s a long walk.”

“Oh, of course,” She exclaims quickly, “or I could drop you off.”

Diego flinches at her tone before shaking his head. “No, I’d much rather walk.”

“Right, well, be safe; um, here’s some money to get yourself something extra at school to eat. And some more to pick up dinner later.”

Diego nods before leaving. Naheida watches from the window as Diego walks with slumped shoulders and head held low. Her heart ached watching him; part of her wanted to follow him, make sure he was okay. But then she saw the neighbor’s daughter, Eliza James, hurry from across the street to meet up with him. They paused and talked before Eliza grabbed his headphones and ran off laughing. Naheida hadn’t realized she was smiling until she heard a knock at the door. She thought about waiting until the knocks stopped, but instead, they grew louder and more frantic. Naheida walks toward the door. When she opened the door, she saw a disheveled Monika James.

“Hi, Mon, are you alright?” Naheida asks, glancing over at her disheveled friend.

“Am I alright?!” Monika shouted, “Do you not check your phone anymore?”

“My phone?” Naheida questioned. Before she could continue, Monika instructed her to grab her phone.

Naheida hesitantly went to the kitchen, grabbed her phone, and returned to the front door.

“It’s best if we take this inside.” Monika urges in a hushed tone.

“Don’t be so melodramatic, Mon.” Naheida refuses, but after catching her friend’s gaze, she returns inside with Monika. They sat at the kitchen table, and Naheida quietly apologized for the mess. Her eyes now trained on her phone, filled with 70 missed calls from Monika, her mother, and Kenny, the family lawyer.

Her eyes widen, and she feels her heart race.

“Type your name into your search,” Monika instructs, breaking the silence.

Naheida does as instructed, and her heart plummets upon seeing the headline. “Alvaro Martin of the astute Martin Family’s Death being investigated as a murder. Top suspect: Wife Naheida Martin.”

The Curtain

Tyler Johnson

I'm not the same as your appetite
Wrapped around that trigger
Because I am willing to follow through.
You've hardly moved a finger for my love
You could do it now,
But then I would depart with purpose.
And that's a prospect you hate—
My fulfillment in epilogue,
A heart unscathed
A parting glance for an unplagued focus
Unchained from what you pinned me as.
A cabaret orchestrated by consequence,
Finishing touches on my encore
Bowling for God, the crowd of me
Not one more.

**Perhaps this wasn't real: an ode to giggling
ghosts**

Z

This is an

Ode to

Being

Just young enough that

Even if someone disappears for seconds it feels like

Centuries without

Them

Perhaps you were too beautiful to be real

Ever delicate as a blooming flower

Ready to blossom for a

Moment

Only a moment, then

Never be seen again

Every time I look in the direction you were last

Nothing is there but an absence of

Certainty that you

Ever existed

A dreadful thing to do is to wake up

Without the scent of you in my sheets

To wonder if you ever existed

If all that time my heart skipped a beat

When I looked your way

Was nothing

If my days

Were spent

Staring at blank walls
Blank canvases
I thought had your beautiful silhouette
Painted in the forefront
But maybe I hadn't even started the masterpiece at
all
But ghosts giggle and haunt these walls
Whispering how they wished they blossomed under
the summer sun
Instead they haunt my soul
Dance with wilted orchids in their hair
I wish they would disappear

That when someone left my life they would be gone
forever
Never dance around my memories
Instead they playfully sing
Dropping bits of their essence
Like petals from japanese cherry trees
In the spring time
For these ghosts are
Bare by the time summer comes along
Their naked glistening bodies
Sparkling in the tears that run down my face
I wish I were so young
That I could erase the concept of you
From existence
That perhaps instead of suffering
With the rest of my ghosts
You may dance in the beams of the summer sun

Koi no yokan

Sophia McKeehan

I remember when I knew
I would fall in love with you
As I watched you laugh and smile
With our friends at the pool table
I thought
You
Me
This
Always.

Who could []

Katie Tovar

Wandering through fire filled dreams
Dreams of hell because you were my deepest lust
My deepest craving was your [ever] licentious gaze
on me

Lust is the hunger of the unheard and unloved

My clothes burned as I tried to take you to me
Your salacious words took me into a web of desire
Then at once I felt the [love] come in my breast
You were so indelicate to take me to your bed

Yet how could I say no
To a woman who could even burn the sun
Call my name and I shall return with a burning
fervor
And darkest ardor was for [you [me]]

Heartache

Rebecca Taliaferro

If my heart could speak

It would bleed and cry.

It would overflow

Until it ran dry.

If my heart could speak

It would continuously try.

But unfortunately, it can't

And neither can I.

Doomed

Marin Crockett

The life I live

The life I give

Criticized from every single gland

Heart of my sleeve

Stripped from goodness

Borrowed by greed

I will never ever succeed.

UNSHATTERED

Rebecca Taliaferro

Spared from long heartache,
Adoration blooms in full,
a soul lashes out,
Intertwined hearts reach within,
Darling promises whispered.



Her Eyes
Z
Medium: collage

Think of the Children

Jackson Cox

Think of the children
And the vile literature
They are allowed to consume
I haven't read any of it
But I'm sure it must be banned

Think of the children
And the social media
Poisoning their little minds
I need to post about this
So others can hear me

Think of the children
And the drag performer
Teaching them self-expression
I need to get the pastor
To set them straight

Think of the children
And their fearful screams
Echoing down the hallway
I will blame their teachers
For not arming themselves

Think of the children
And the terror they must feel
Helpless, without support
But

I will make this about myself
Because I never intended to

Think of the children

Girlfriends

Olivia Harrison

We scribble hearts onto our papers while we're taking notes. Pretty pink things, the same color as our frantic underlines. The things we think are most important.

I lean in close, and whisper that I watched Barbie this past weekend, and cried 7 times. She doesn't laugh, or roll her eyes, or call me crazy. Instead, her eyes light up, and she tells me that she cried too.

We talk about tulips and literature and death. We braid each other's hair into elaborate arrangements, and adorn our artwork with ribbons. We cry in each other's arms, often, over lovers whose names and faces will be forgotten in weeks, or, sometimes, not ever. We sing at the top of our lungs, not afraid that we'll be judged. We pour our thoughts out like water, not afraid we'll be ignored.

We take care of each other, no matter what, regardless of the world's desire for us to tear each other to pieces, to prove we are more worthy of love, of sex, of happiness, than the rest of our gender. Why? when it is so beautiful to be recognized, understood, and loved. When it is so beautiful to be a woman among women.

HELP!

Rebecca Taliaferro

HELP!

Was all that was heard from afar
Bloodied tears and frightful scars
A small child, no older than twelve
Defeated in pain from the blows dealt.

HELP!

Such a gut-wrenching cry
As she continued to scream “oh, Lord why”
With her captor over her holding rusted chains
As he menacingly smiled at her bloody frame.

HELP!

She screamed as she was dragged across the floor.

HELP!

She would scream once more.
But help the poor child never received
her small body decayed, rotted in the pretty autumn
leaves.

And since help never came for the girl in the
ground

The man who took her still freely walks around
Waiting patiently for the next child who is lost and
astray

The reignited evil glint in his eye shining for his
next prey.

HELP!

Not a sound that is unknown to him
But to the unaware children looking in.

To Carry her Lie

Elizabeth Blanchard

affected by blamed innocence—
the trial of imprisonment or war
opens wounds of sickened blood
never held, never come back
even fault of fabrication can't
mend what had been said, what had been spread
every touch of his lust and love confined to shelves
naive lies sewn in her curious, spying eyes
tell not a truth, but a world in which virtue really
dies

Twisted Sister

Kagome N.Y.

Walking behind iron bars, running your fingers on a
two-faced trellis

A heartbeat heard too far, but who's to say who's
been overzealous?

Sunrise, sunset, do you start to forget, the road set
in stone, that led you here

Falling like the rain, may the petals wash away the
pain, covering the cuts that bleed your fear

Burned around the edges, screaming every word
aloud

Aching from the inside out, plead to let her be for
now

(For now, and forever)

Spiraling vines that ensnare you within

Sensual spikes injecting serotonin

Machined is the man who thinks he needs to run

Love me? Love me not? Let's go one by one

Am I embracing your heart, or am I crushing your
bones?

Do I whisper a story, or give you deaf tones?

Do I take the crown of your garden, or take your
soul to sell?

Do you take pleasure in the fact that you can't quite
tell?

Come closer, I don't bite...
...I already know what you taste like.

'Cause I'm your twisted sister, and you know it to
be true
I'm stalking in your shadow, every breath, I'm
breathing you
The thought of me disgusts you, and yet you don't
know why
You look so much better with a flower for an eye

HOLLYWOOD HOTSHOTS

Rebecca Taliaferro

The car was dead silent, after what had just happened how could it not be? The only thing left to do was sit there and think how'd they get away from it all. The quickness of the whole ordeal left them with no choice but a single gunshot, a poorly executed plan, and the will to rise to fame.

“Are you done yet? We've been out here for hours.”

“Yea hours we don't have, so if you can stop complaining that would be great.”

“You know the only reason why we're in this mess is because you couldn't keep your mouth shut.”

“Well, if I did, you'd be in this hole and not him. Now can you please help me out? This body's not gonna bury itself.”

“Are you daft? I'm not gonna help after you blew the poor kid's head off.”

“Well, the chamber's not exactly empty if you wanna join him. Now hurry up.”

Earlier that night, the two cops had decided they wanted to make headlines.

They were in a bar crowded and stuffy. As they tried to navigate their way through, their next victim was found as the heated glances of a particular young man had caught one of the police officers' attention.

“Hey, look over at that booth. Does that boy look familiar to you?”

“He looks just like the last one, if that’s what you're getting at.”

With a small sneer placed on his face he walked over to that booth across the bar and grabbed the boy and dragged him out back. He made sure to look into that camera placed in the corner and smile.

Breaking news: 21-year-old, young black male Jackie Thompson has been reported missing. Three days ago, the young male was last seen at around 12PM leaving out of the bar ‘Moonlight’ and has not been seen or heard from again. Last seen with him were the two infamous cops; Daniel McGregor and Ethan White. This is UBN news reporting live.

Trap of When

Katie Tovar

The pot on the stove shakes so slightly with the heat
boiling it over.

He enters her world. His feet walking in puts weight
in the air.

All breathable space leaves with his return.
Shut out with a soft snap of the door.

She says what was done for generations.
“How was your day?”
“Good.”

He puts a lid on the soup and makes a joke.
She tries not to think of the weight on the back of
her throat
Or the sensation of fear bringing up tears.
Which welled in the eyes get burned on the state of
When.
He laughs and pours himself a drink, ask her what
she thinks of Chinese.

Like a dream she floats through it all,
The dinner, the conversation, the desires of his love.
Floating through his dream.

He lays his head to sleep,
She can finally sneakily breathe.
To the kitchen she goes,

To find it filled with smoke.

When will it turn? When will it change?
When can I be a better mate? When can I be good
enough?
When will he hit me?

But it burns her eyes and chokes out her dreams
So, she throws the pot in the sink.
Remembering her grandma scrubbing as she says:
“Someday I’ll have enough, just wait and see—
When.”

Solar Solace

Evan Calabrese

I lay beneath the boundless void
They appear to me
Dancing, twinkling
Showing off their moves

The light of long extinguished stars
Bathing me in their luminescence
A feeling of safety, of home
For they are ancient progenitors

Our creators, solar forgeworks
Broken under the infinite mass
Only to be dispersed out violently
And the cycle repeats

We are inevitable, destiny
An unbroken chain of cosmic
Evolution, borne of chaos
The universe experiencing itself

Consent

Z

I teeter on the fine line of consent and giving in
Knowing when I fall
I will plummet into ecstasy or dissociation
Both proving to be a long descent

The first kiss clears the fog in my mind
I see the stars for what seems the first time in years
Though I have seen them time and time again
I forget who laid there with me

I start the game with the first embrace
Because we all know it's just a game

They say stretch your arms like wings
Turn your hands into fists, grasp onto the sheets
Curl your feet
The tightrope starts to shake
To methodical thrusts

I never remember the moment I falter and fall
I either wake up covered in sweat, safe in the bed
Or my soul drops with the rest of the stars
Shattering in the atmosphere
Crashing into the earth
Where people hoard the bits of gold

Chandrasekhar limit

Katie Tovar

There is a moment— A time
When it all crashes in— Not out
Even though the sensation is out
You are lost in that moment.

The body remembers
The mind forgets

In (and breathe)
Out (Release)

It comes flooding in and
it's spinning out of control.
But you are no longer small
You have the voice to say;

The body remembers
The mind forgets

In (it comes)
Out (it doesn't leave)

Memory can fade and shift.
So let it in, when it comes.
Let it out when it's time— let it spin.
In that moment you are a Supernova.



Raccoon Near Spanish Moss

Lindsay Pettinicchi

Medium: digital photography – 900 x 720

Reminisce

Traliya Mitchell

In my past life, I may have been a Tree.

Noticing things only they would, after a thousand years of practicing stillness. Being refuge for others. Bearing the basic needs for life. Every tree is the giving tree.

I carry the memories of my old life with me, through jewelry, tree printed clothes, a nickname.

I can remember— the community coming together to make God’s masterpiece. As the acorn had to drop for the squirrels, the butterfly had to sacrifice itself, to feed the baby jays blue as the sky.

While others admired that burning ball at dawn, I enjoyed the cool calm nights. Where I could collect my thoughts as if I haven’t had time to do that all day. My favorite part in particular was the sound the crickets made; it ringed in my ears like music, as the wind Carried my spirit into oblivion – My peace was the stillness or the lack of it all.

Now, I get to spy on the night like a detective looking for clues... I spy... the family of white tail deer, with their piercing stare and unsteady, not wanting to be disturbed. The tree frogs that love to visit me after a storm, occupying

my windowsill as if it's their right. Even the detestable cockroaches are on their midnight stroll. I guess it'd make sense, if I were a tree, I still carry all these memories with me.

Whale

Chad Merritt

It's now, you say,
The breaching begins, dark behemoth
Crawling out from under swells, the sight
Blinds the conscious and gifts the songs
To a mighty god different from our own:
Poseidon's tears never evade the tomb
Of his cerulean lakes, the rivers of his iris
To blustered gusting pleasures, hinted and stroked
By wandering fools, the Whale flits and flickers
Birthing a calf for Poseidon's daughters
To carve veal from, not needing salt to taste
Poseidon, shunned and ravaged by mudlark gulls,
Scarecrow terns, sifting through blue sinew and
Flesh, for a singular piece of soul.

A Keen Eye

Elizabeth Blanchard

Bark of the Oak

Effortlessly scrapes my palms and

Draws marks of red on each line

As I see

An Overture

Gardenias begin to hibernate their redolent perfume

Their saturated leaves casually shrivel

Into nearly colorless crisps

Blown afloat by a strange wind that brings

Death of blossoms

And

Birth of a new hue

TRAPPED

Debi Boccanfuso

I sat with four spiders. They paid me no mind and I kept my distance. How many more shared the dock, unseen in those dark, predawn hours at Lake Somerset?

The four made me wonder if they all belonged to a secret society; a community of like-minded creatures. I wondered if each made its own web or if they ever shared webs. Would one spider ever take over another's web or did they live in peace? Like toddlers busy with parallel play, each spider, in its own space and time, trapped unsuspecting flies in the glow of the early morning crescent moon. Watching them, I itched without reason; an imagined crawl on my skin.

I squinted. One spider pulled itself along an invisible line connecting two columns like a circus tightrope walker while another clung tightly to its center spot swaying in the morning breeze. A third headed down the column, paused, then started back up. Careful not to intrude, I adjusted my position. There it was, the spider's path, a thin thread, barely visible. It would have stayed invisible to me had it not been for the slowly rising sun which just now began to highlight the edges of the treetops. Below the dock, the lake's surface, initially dark and still, was beginning to shimmer.

My attention turned back to the fourth spider. Its legs twitched; the back two rubbed together. In the increasing sunrise, did I just become visible to him? Was he now watching me? I wondered if spiders ever slept. Do they work all night? Is daybreak their time to quiet themselves and rest?

Perhaps sensing my presence, it found its balance, turned, and left me. A chill breeze brushed across me.

Those spiders made me think of the times I've spun my own complicated webs while others slept. I've manipulated situations, captured unsuspecting individuals in invisible traps, and then had full control of the decision to keep or release them. And then, like that fourth spider, there have also been times that I looked around, found my balance, turned, and walked away while others stood and watched, knowing someone would slowly die in a position they never wanted to be in.

Evergreen

Hope Taylor

Can't you see that the earth lies
Within your eyes
Like grass field where we met
As stunning as leaves
After the sky weeps

Illuminating as the sun shines
Like rays through the trees
They say that it's like golden hour
But I say it's like you and me

Every moment spent with you
I'm left with peace and serenity
With you wrapped around
Anything is possible
Warmth, safety

Content with only the four walls
But your depth spans for miles
Bringing nothing but endless smiles
Lucky like a four leaf clover
Leaving me nothing but a roamer

Wishing you could see
All you can be
Hoping only that
You love me the same

My Prodigal Mother

A. Miller

I wait with open arms for my prodigal mother to
come home

Though the nights have been long and sleepless
and my joints have grown wary waiting for her
knock upon my tomb.

On the other side of our abode, I'm sure she has
done the same.

Her arms are aching as mine do for me to throw
myself aside

And fall to her knees in forgiveness for the choices I
have made.

For my ventures of love, the foundation of my
beliefs exist only

In opposition to hers

a denial of the kind of love she has shown me.

She prays I'll split my feelings open like a swine

And lay myself down for us both to feast

While I wait for her to extend an olive branch. A
gesture that was always hers and never mine.

Though she believes it is love for the indifferent
that makes this world go round,

It was I who was lost and needed to find my way
back down to the ground.

Crash

Laura Payne

The waves crash on the pier. I look up towards what used to be my bluest skies, now painted the darkest gray. The lights on the ferris wheel are not as bright as they always were. The sun is going down as it only gets colder. I'm lost again. Time stands still but the waves continue crashing, the waves of my guilt. They are always here to remind me. The waters are still too big for me to jump over, just like when I was a kid. This time, I didn't jump. The water ran red.

Forest from the Trees

Katie Tovar

When I set out the majestic trees of the forest
sighed.

Every breath sighed was your name when you were
found.

Reaching heights, I dreamed you could be; you took
me further in the trees.

I followed you without a second glance, and the
verdant powers did their dance.

Forest do this all the time, losing their lovers in
their fights.

Every breath was “I should leave” as we wandered
through the green.

So, were we just wanderers troubled even back
then?

Then we stopped. You forgot so did I so and wild
woods began to sigh.

Every breath was your name again. And the forest
began to whisper

Reaching heights, we never dreamed, we began to
turn to trees.

I felt the desire to tell them “Go” and they did as I
spoke.

Another one runs in a rush, long after we are dust,
just like you and me.



Meditations After Rain

Z

Medium: mixed media

No Cage of Clemency

Elizabeth Blanchard

Quiet pieces of peace
Glide over the cold, serene grass of home
Never interfering with the other of no ardor

No sublime

No light

Golden greens shine by the shade

—side by side

And act that of glass, stained

Pouring their truthful tinges

On the back of our necks

As we sit, never peeking

Back

An organ plays

And pumps

its melodies

—its life

Through rays of above

As the marrow of who I was

Stays

Encased

To finally be let

Into the light

Echoes of Identity

Rebecca Taliaferro

I am the way the trees grow

I am my mother's daughter

I am an ambient keeper

I am the wayward of my father

I am turbulent peace

I am a frivolous mind

I am gambled decisions

I am niche finds

I am enduring hands

I am the wisps of wind

I am a stirring heart

I am feared skin

I am the song of sunrise

I am the earth's delight

I am the uprise of tides

I am the whispered night.

Reunited apart

Graceyn Yonce

I.

I owe all I am to you,
My friends of immeasurable value.
You have introduced me to
Wandering pines of dreams
And knowledge of the undercurrent.
My eyes search for flaming hair
And the sound of hooves
(the stampede of laughter),
Everywhere I go.
When I sit still,
I'm there again:
Back against stone,
Eyes wide, entranced
By black sky. Heart
Heavy with ache,
It wishes to sing along
With each of you
Together again.
It is not to be,
For all I am,
I owe to you,
Oh,
You who have
Departed from me.

II.

My love, I thank you.
Your sun has made the

Day awake once more,
And your insight of life
Has formed an uncaged
Creature of curiosity within.
And you! I haven't forgotten.
Unnamed, as the others,
Holding such grandeur.
Waterfalls seep through
Your fingers onto the pages
Of those around you.
Cadence of warm light,
Bowed crown of humility.
All of you, my dear friends,
Are of immeasurable value.

Compass

Elizabeth Blanchard

I'll get lost with you
And talk of war-torn love letters
And find beauty in the ones below
And gaze at statues forever askew
And peer into gates we only think to pass through
And glance into windows
Of socialites on saturday nights
And walk to black waters far from the light
To where the dragonflies swarm and take their flight
And feel like the child I was before—
looking for the three owls in a bookstore

And then
I'll write of you
And all of what came true
That one afternoon
I got lost with you in June

Life isn't a fairytale

Kayla Sheriffe

“Life isn't a fairytale.”

Yeah, I know. No Disney princess movie could have prepared me for the endless frustration, anger, and disappointment life holds. I thought my adventure was going to be magical. I was going to walk down gumdrop lanes, fall in love with a prince, and be the happiest girl that ever walked the face of the earth. But I've had far too many experiences where my bed brought me more comfort than any candy-filled street, and I realized boys find it quite amusing to impersonate princes.

She's a young black woman trying to navigate through a world that was specifically built against her. She tries so hard to prove her worth to others; but mostly to herself. Life has suddenly become a cannon that doesn't stop firing. Does she ever catch a break? Does she sound familiar? If you ask me, she's who I see in the mirror. Though, the young lady I am referring to is the iconic Princess Tiana. But life isn't a fairytale, right? I'm well aware, but that is my reality. Minus kissing frogs, Princess Tiana's story is my everyday life, and unfortunately, no scene in the movie truly depicts how draining it can all be. I was given no outline or preparation for this. Life was supposed to be dreamy and enchanting, not unjust, and corrupt.

Strolling through the streets like a princess suddenly causes utmost paranoia as the once colorful and welcoming roads have become dark and scary. This is no fairytale! It's undoubtedly a nightmare.

But don't forget you wake up from nightmares just as you awake from your coziest dreams. They aren't permanent, good, or bad. It's life. No princess is stuck in her terrors through the whole movie. She experiences it. She finds her light in the darkest places, realizes her purpose, carries, and accepts her troubles gracefully. She lives life! She lives her fairytale!

Unfortunately, I've never talked to animals, sung musicals, or fallen into a deep slumber to which I can only be awakened by the kiss of true love. No, but I have experienced laughter until I couldn't breathe, the smell of fresh coffee in the morning, and warm hugs that were oh-so-needed. I've experienced heartbreak, betrayal, and resentment. I've experienced life through color and in black and white. Our existence is messy, scary, anxious, and sad, but also so beautiful, peaceful, silly, and nostalgic. Life is an unscripted balance of emotions, but if you ask me, that sounds like a fairytale.

Wishing Blue

Elizabeth Blanchard

Lightless, rigid silence
partnered with stone;
cold
scarce of life
(green or flesh)

Grasping onto the bottom
where I joined
out of The Blue

Climbing
hands held on rock
&
unprotected soles

Bleeding
marks on all fours
&
stigmata deep cuts

Looking up,
Vertiginous and circling
from beyond the grave
a cast of someone—
hollow & unwarranted
My starvation of a mouth can only mutter:

“You were never my wishing well.”

I am poem

Z

I am the colic that ailed your newborn son
I am the clip on the bow tie your nephew wore
I am the kiss he gave every boy and girl in his class
I am the crack in your middle school friend's voice
I am the lunch box he hit his teacher with
I am mud on your athletes cross country shoes
I am the first medal he won
I am the words of your brother's first poem
I am the trees that hid you and your boyfriend
I am the tears he cried when you bullied him
I am the tick on the clock when he wanted to die
I am the bulletin boards that held up all his art
I am the first day of college
I am the dark purple color of his first car
I am the 900 dollars you sold it for
I am the suitcase that moved him across the country
I am the dosage on his antidepressants
I am the grippy socks he wore in the psych ward
I am the Savannah skyline
I am the ledge on the Talmadge Bridge
I am not your son, your brother, your student your
friend or your lover

Get out

Mia Klinger

She needed you to protect her.

She was no longer her.

Her body was there but her mind had to be
protected from the pain she could no longer bear.

She was cold.

She was hopeless.

Because the ones who are supposed to be there were
the ones that hurt her the most.

“How can your protector and provider become your
worst nightmare” she asks.

He replies, “it’s because they were hurt and don’t
know how to stop the cycle themselves.”

I want to get out

I have to get out

I need to get out

The cycle ends with me

No more hurt people, hurt people

Hurt people need to heal.

As I heal I won’t resent what ones have done to me,
but rather learn and grow.

As I heal I will understand why you did what you
did, but question why you did it to me.

As I heal I will learn to forgive you for the pain you
have caused, but I’ll never forget.

So now I know to
let
it
go.



Las nubes tampoco alcanzarán el sol

Lessle Rodriguez

Medium: graphite on paper – 17x14”

Sons of the Mourning

Elizabeth Blanchard

From grace
Goodness sadly caves
Here, originality never fades
Cherubim's cheeks cold to touch
Scorched by estranged deities of such

As a Botticelli's wings bruise and become flightless
Their washing waters fumigate filth
Withering and Writhing
In a font born unblessed
Inevitably conceived
In a found home
Down to where angels shall roam

All I Know

Evan Calabrese

Is that I don't
I wonder on nature
Of my own and that of trees
I wander these woods
Both within and outside my mind
What can I learn?
I yearn for 'Aha'!
A breakthrough
Dimethyltryptamine
Perhaps
The God Particle
But even then
All I know
Is that I know
Nothing
At
All

Ladies of Bath

A. Miller

She

Is not how Venus or Eve are described

But she's a goddess to me.

Her

body is a temple capable of giving and receiving

Of ins and outs

Of soft lips and lilted pouts

Though you are an angel

Of how the bible described

Of multiple shining blue eyes

And four legs spread

With me

torn between the reality of two choices

And you

An overwhelming cacophony of hands and tongues

and voices

Vowing to worship me as I worship you

You are not what my Father imagined

But your body is a holy altar

A temple

To you

And you

And me

In the end,

I will be no Queen

but the Queen of Jericho.

Your temptation will be the ruination
Of my throne
My crown will come toppling down
But the city from which I came
Is much wickeder than the love I had found
Within your lust.

N.W.O.

Kagome N.Y.

...so, how does this start?

It starts however you want, big man. This is your crash pad, after all.

I'd prefer something a touch more dignified than "crash pad".

Oh, pshh, c'mon... home plate? Neck of the woods? Humble abode? Nook 'n cranny?

Whaddaya want from me?

A number of things, chief among which being an explanation as to why you've decided to scatter glass all over my paperwork.

Don't gimme that look. I remember the days when using someone's thirtieth-story window as an entrance would get half the precinct after your hide.

You'd know all about hides, wouldn't you, ringtail? Had more of them to wear than you've had suits, and somehow that's less than the last office I was in.

So that's what this is? A casual spat of corporate espionage?

Pfft— ha-ha-ha, oh, sweet summer child... "Corporate espionage" implies I'm working for someone. This is just me indulging my desires. You can't possibly be that—

Kinda like you!

...beg pardon?

Well, stop me if you heard this before—
we're not so different, you and I.

That feels more like an insult.

Think about it. We're both creatures of impulse— I
mean, everyone is in one way or another, so
no shame in admitting it— but we do something
different with that impulse. One impulse might
make a night of fun, the other might make a tower
block or two.

Are you being real right now?

...real? We're sitting here with herbal brews
from 300 years ago, using radio waves for
transportation, and both you and I could be smack
in the middle of Tycho in ten minutes. All of this,
and you're seriously gonna question if I'm real?
Of course I am, why wouldn't—

...

Hm.

Paging the maid hall, requesting a glass cleanup in
the penthouse... and tea for two, please.

Khrysos as Anchurus Recounts (For Alex Murdaugh)

Chad Merritt

Engulfed by your own golden sentiment
Midas dies in silver swarms, in Helios's birth,
In Zeus's compromise, beach mourning disarray
Lurking, searching, cold and reaching for
Thrashing dirt, kennel dreamers of ruined vessel,
Daylight swallows, your own
Theia begged for mercy,
Legacies buried to burned trinities
Brushed off by mother's woolgathering,
Hyperion's rushing anger-floating demon
Of salted lees finally lights paths for
Lapses painted in gold, off to Parthenon,
Off to the hills of wicked pastures
Forever and forever, as moonlight passes,
Selene is weeping, Eos is dreaming
As Ares flies, Plutus tussles away in the mud
In the thin layered compliance of Dionysus,
Of a simmering southern summer's night
Thanatos laughs, head held back in belly howls
As you get shanked in the prison showers
Framed Rhamnusia, you call it,
I call it a forever fleeting end
To a dynasty of puissant liars and thieves,
To a cursed name, Murdaugh family values
Bound in burning eternal sunlight.

Deserved Damnation

Elizabeth Blanchard

A punishment, deserved
Until she made herself sick

Lying bare
Dirt made into mud
Seeped down
The pages of her old self
 her younger self
Dampened and tarnished
Soon like the silver spoon spooled
Around her finger and of what
Left the limerence linger

She yearned to stay sane
 to be
 who she was told not
 to be

Leaves her lying
Turning dirt into mud
This, all she can do
All she has to
For she cannot be anything but

Frigid

Sophia McKeehan

Sometimes I run naked in the frozen field
Sometimes I trudge through the snow

To the depths of the white forest
To the place where nothing lives

Where it's just myself and the snow
Where I too become

Everything and nothing

All at once

Victor's Legacy

Gracie Laseter

The howl of the wind
creeps through my ear canals
As the leaves crunch under my footsteps
And rustled along the edge of the tarp
Creating a warning siren
That echo off the surrounding buildings
But ringing in no other ears

The dead weight seemed to grow with each step
A burning sensation festers,
slowing creeping across my shoulder blade
Begging for a mere moment of rest
But
curfew will lift in the wee morning hours
And the streets would again flood with people
Who would see me
With him
Trudging along,
I bargain with my body
Reminiscing of the reward
For maintaining my stride
Brings me
my magnum opus
my prometheus

Relief spreads through my bones
As he falls onto the table
Examining the curves of this chest,

I daydream
Of the empty cavity
His heart
in my creature
Bringing him to life.
Bringing him to me.

After Watching Resnais's Night and Fog

Chad Merritt

God is rambling, out within nightclouds,
As His eyes break open furious
White veins out to pasture seas,
Crashing against this purple moonshimmered land,
Out to Westerbork and back again,
Or never to arrive at all.
Birkenau dreams, raindrenched striped torn cloth,
God's chosen David reduced to a pissy yellow patch:
Blasphemy, the Wolf's game,
The Wolf's name carved
Within Bathsheba's bullet, in wake of transgression,
Dark angels, sadist beasts and butchers,
Bloodlust coyotes,
Kneel before our Beloved,
And plead with Him, plead with Him to not send
You to a place far worse than Nuremburg could
Ever lend, to a place where what you laid unto His
Would be laid unto you a thousand times, in an
Infinite upended madness,
An infinite reign of arrows
And I cannot promise a withdrawn or
A suppressed wrath,
Or even an uncompromised ear,
A circle bearing warmth,
But I can promise you a public hanging
Or, if you're lucky,
A one-way ticket to Manhattan, where you'll serve
A different flag, one that surely

Understands the Wolf's game,
Where it's as cold as Munich in midwinter,
But not nearly as harsh
As the eternal death that is hanging fire,
So patient and forbearing,
The Father of Babylon is there, waiting for you,
Silent, but present
In the night and in the fog.



Better Than Your Lawn

Jen McCarty

Medium: acrylic on canvas – 5x7”

Flowerbed Love Songs

Jackson Cox

If a lily a day could sing my romance
I would gift my flesh unto the earth
 And plant a garden in my heart just for you
I would mold my soul into a vase for them
 Collecting my love and signing it in blood
I would sacrifice all that I am
 Just to see laughter line your visage again
I would burn the world and the sky
 In delivering justice in your name
I would build a castle and an empire
 Only to tear it all down at your first call
I would even abandon my yearning for you
 If my desires absence would bring you
peace
I would eclipse suffering and struggle with my
devotion
 If a lily a day could sing my romance...

**Rotting peaches under the summer sun: the
night you almost died**

Z

That night I was supposed to be in Savannah
I went
But I left
I am not sure why
The best way to describe it is that
It smelt like rotting peaches under the summer sun
And what a distinct odor
As their discoloration turns warm hues
Into greys and blues
That plump flesh of the fruit
Shriveled
And some of us prefer it that way
As spots and bruises cover our skin
Muscles decay
Come closer to the core
Yet death is not picky when it comes to produce and
perhaps prefers deterioration
But when death took a bite you howled in agony
All of us were shocked the devil did not consume
you whole
Some say it was a miracle
However a part of your mushy moldy brain
Died that night
And the devil will never return it
Oh rotting peaches under the summer sun
I often think of how death will either swallow you
whole

Even the core
Or how he sometimes savors miniscule bites
Taking sips of lemonade in between
They say I saved your life
Yet I can't help but
Wonder how much of you is gone
perfect peach
And if I was the cause of it all

resume

Tyler Johnson

notice me

distraught by your lack of self
for eternity

motioning to finger-pointing rhythm
that reflects on me.

my event

a dahlia, maybe deserved

wilting away from home, or to,
if you believe in that.

La Terreur Cramoisie

Jackson Cox

Remember the nightmare from the end of time
A red eclipse emerging beyond the molten lead
Eels ablaze lash out within the sea of shadows
Sprinting through the molasses of silence
Futile grasping at an edge all too far to reach
Shrieks barred from escaping the void within
Prior hopes disfigured by conquering dread

Waiting to Come Home

Hope Taylor

Every day I walk by you
Waiting for my time to
Meet you once and for all
Your being is not contained by four walls
Making me question if I feel dread or peace

So solid and strong yet
Broken into soft soil
Sprouting new life daily
All while trying to make yourself whole
By taking in the nutrients
To bring yourself closer to our souls

As I take you into my hand
We grow closer
Making me wonder how long
I'll be waiting to come home to you
Precious earth to bring with hope
My being will supply healthy foundation
For new life's roots to grow

Even if I must wait forever
I'll be a part of the dirt again

hhi

Chad Merritt

welcome to hhi,
where the supermarkets
and high-end restaurants handle
dyed-black haired forty-year-old cats
dating girls half their age
and sun-tattered seventy-year-old dogs
playing golf while they order gentrification,
book bannings for supper

welcome to hhi,
where the salted shores are stained
with linen as white cotton grows
not so far away
and videogame-shirted seven-year-old cubs
are making sex gestures to their
coupon-junkie mothers, and i notice
why misanthropy is such a common sin

welcome to hhi,
where the ambitious naive yearn for concrete
overpasses hanging above neutered nature
to bastardize my only free hand
while the catholic chapel crumbles me,
crucifix rusts, confessional cabal,
as red-faced whiskey priest
spit dots my cheek

welcome to hhi,
where the limp-dicked rich

beat their bloody-lipped wives in smoke-laden bars,
where cologne-swamped divorce lawyers
reach their affluence, as do the
nicotine-painted liquor storeowners,
the unending exploitation of the old,
forever classic american sin

welcome to hhi
where the weasel-faced senators
vacation to make deals
about all your sunken futures,
to rip away all your lovely sutures,
no more blood left to bleed,
as they take away every forbidden
sliver of silver and iron

welcome to hhi
where the midlife hedonist crises
burgeon the playboy daydreams,
the classy sportscars buzzing
around like gnats, while mosquitos
extract the cocaine drippings
from your begrudging nosebleed
to release another little sin

welcome to hhi
where sun city has been laid to rest
in overcast, where the wrinkle-lined able
must reflect on their wasteful, sickened lives,
why they voted in more of those
power-thirsting, lusting cockroaches
as they lap away at your sense of self,

as supermarkets hold.

welcome to hhi, we hope you enjoy your stay.

For M,

red

A. Rackley

red will never be the same
i never imagined my perception of an entire color
could be altered
but here we are
i will never look at red the same way
i will never look at rubies or roses or apples,
without thinking of that coat
without thinking about how long my eyes searched
for it in a crowded room
without thinking about how it felt to finally see you
the most beautiful thing i've ever seen
all things faded away in that moment
you could've been wearing any color, and it
would've had this same effect on me
you just happened to be wearing red.

-A

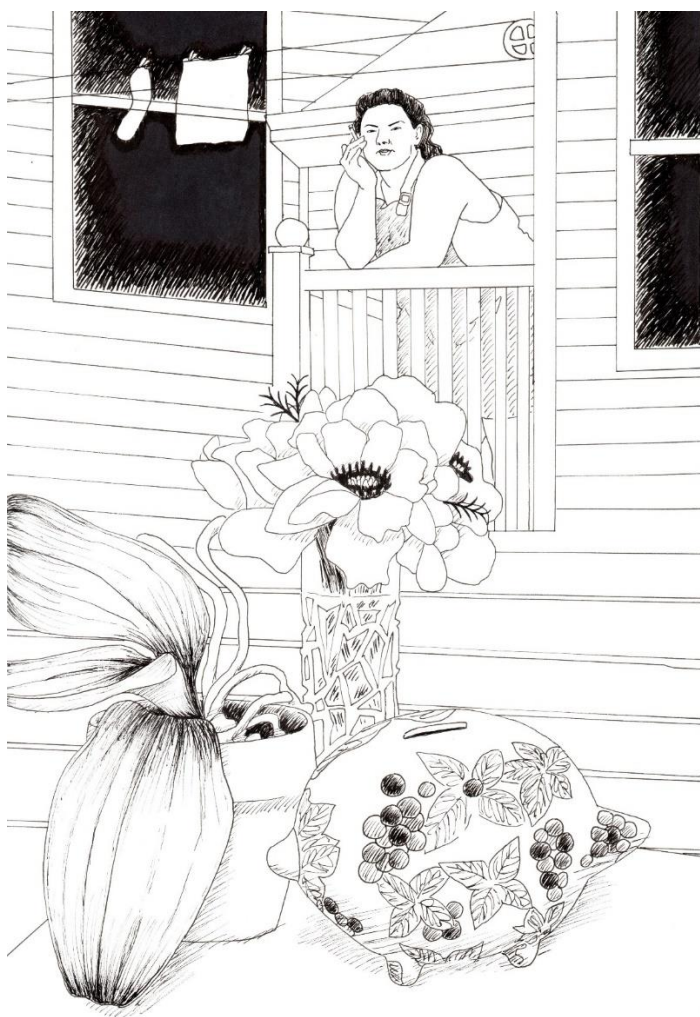
Foxgloves

Graceyn Yonce

As a child, I
Sat here for
Hours, breaking
Apart the daisies
By the doorstep.
My grandfather's
Pride, his work,
Torn by the
Tiny hands of
My childhood.
I used to run
Down the
Hand-laid stones,
Across the grass,
Into the imagined
Arms of some
Forgotten friend.
Faces in the trees
Spoke with the
Wind, and I
No longer hear them.

I apologize.
My introduction
Has not yet
Been made,
But you already
Understand me

So well. My
Grandfather
Planted foxgloves
In his yard.
He'll harvest
The seeds for the next season,
and we will walk across
The stone bricks
Of his pride and
Work to admire the
Foxgloves once
More.



The Smoker

Anna Szalc

Medium: ink and alcohol marker on Bristol paper –
12x8”

Departure.

Graceyn Yonce

To completely understand,
You must breathe life
Into the pages.
These words have reflections,
And they're stolen behind
Your eyes.
What hides behind the folded edges?
Look up, your world is passing by.
Your moments are fleeting
As your lungs stretch out like
The tongues of vultures.
They fight and bleed
Over carcasses of fresh air,
Their talons scratching
The flesh for more dead blood.
Revived again, they carry new life
As charcoal wings beat against
Humid air.
Before they make their leave,
The birds of afterlife bow their heads
To the skeletons of what remains:
For what is dead is dead,
And what is alive
Is soon to cry.

Plaques

Tyler Johnson

The secret of you is confidential merely by pity
You should spit on your mirror instead of in your
sink

You crooked, Stonehenge of a thief

Fueled by a motive of sleep,

Eroded by your weak hold on your own beliefs

If it's not your blood, it's an ode to me

It's a matter of satisfaction,

This rattled sense of grief

A classic, relaxing, pristine,

Clash of the glasses

In the back of this hatchback limousine

Relapsing into relief,

With or without dreams.

Your plaques are safe with me.

One Night

Katie Tovar

She placed the book down and rubbed her eyes with a sigh. The roses were left outside the door this time and had made her eye everything around her. She tossed them in the trash outside, burying the card in a tomato can so that even if he looks he won't see it. She glanced around the room, if he left flowers, he might have come in. Scratching her arms she tiptoed through her rooms, finding nothing. She picked at the skin around her nails, causing herself to bleed. He would be home tonight, and she needed it to be perfect. Deployed for 6 months, he had been a nice distraction. But when she ended it, the rage and assault made her realize he really wasn't much different from Jace. She glanced at the clock, 11:21, it's five somewhere, right? Right? She poured herself a glass, seeing Jace's text saying it'd be 5 more hours by bus before he was home.

She needed to make a good dinner and convince herself that things were okay. But she picked and picked at her skin around her nails, the acrylics which were a virginal white being dyed red. She heard the door open and heard a set of keys down with the book, him snorting at the cover. He rounded the corner, and his face was bright but exhausted.

“Come here.” Opening his arms to her, and she went to him easily tucked into his arms so lightly.

“Alice, why did you do this again?”

She was icy as she saw roses in the book. He pulled out his knife. She knew it was over.

Secrets

Gracie Laseter

The words burn my lips
As they crawl out of my throat
Overpowering the conscious
That kept them contained
Escaping through my teeth
They desperately lunge
To closet ear canals
To bury into the brain
Of another soul
Letting them in
On the
Secret

Toast

Z

I

With a dull butter knife
Spread paper thin layers of my essence
Over burnt dry toast
That I stole from the market in the middle of the
night
The substance
So thin
That you cannot feel
My existence on your burned out body
Not even feel a tingling in your skin
I called your name into the void of your eyes
Hoping you would answer
Not knowing that no one taught you how to speak
That not even a whisper could come from your lips
I feed you the toast
The only object to my name
Other than the toaster that will stay with me
Till my ironic soon coming oblivion
30hrs is a long time to stay awake
And they say in hopeful wishful thinking
That it takes 30 days to change
30 years is a long time to watch nothing change
And view deterioration happen slowly
I
With a dull butter knife
Spread paper thin layers of my essence
On

Burnt

Dry toast

I stole from the market in the middle of the night

I feed it to you

And wait.

A Letter to a Girl

Evan Calabrese

To me you are so much more than
That which you likely are
It's my condition, romanticization
Wax poetic, wax these tears from my eyes

When we met, my mind was a wicked storm
Thunder & lightning crackled, the seas rough
I knew no end, thought it to be my fate
And yet there you were
A brilliant ray of sunshine
I basked in your light
And became whole again
Reacquainted with joy

But we are a selfish type of creature
I longed for more
Sought to bottle up that sunshine
And when I flew too close
I forgot, all at once, Icarus
And his hubris

Your rays scorched me
And while my skin has grown anew
The scars remain, an ever-present reminder
To bask in the sun as it shines
And not be despondent on a cloudy day

I think I hurt you more than myself

And for that I apologize
I did not like who I was then
And seek, everyday, to be more of me
And less of him

Thank you, forever and always
For even in imperfection
You seemed perfect, to me

Are You Coming Home for Christmas?

Chad Merritt

Red sweaters curled in jest around thy face
Forgive Mishima houses for misuse
The soft slant of illumination's grace
Bemuse the pines, bewildered night I bruise.

Tautology sufficed, pretentions win
Around the table, Hemingway's sole mass
As another cigar ignites a skin
Unfavored vent: thy tongue and speech, thy glass

The candlelight traverses thy blue tears
To the Northern cynosure of wise kings
The snowflakes call for Camus's eggnog ears
Winedrunk, the eve of Christ and adorning

And as thy sleighbells croon, Kerouac sleeps,
In the same bed where Joyce and Steinbeck weep.

Wright Family Park.

Graceyn Yonce

-

Cuts on dock
Run red,
Shirtless fishermen
Sink over
Edge as
Dolphins
Break water
Under sinking
Sun.
Skin, cooled
By water, rests, kicking
The surface
Right over
The break
From wood.

-

The boats
Rush by,
Interrupting
Conversations
Below. Idle!
Here, idle.
Spirit seeks
Comfort from
Other seeking
Spirits, sunk
So low into

Themselves
That it takes
a Terrific Event
To bring them out.

-

Have you
Met yourself?
Have you
Shaken hands
With the
Consciousness
Under the fingers?
The actions
Follow the
Motives under,
Dancing together,
Swaying with
Unspoken weight.
(You pull the weight,
The motives,
Of the under).

-

Water rushes
To the sun now,
Much like the eyes.
They sweep over
The ground, the sky,
The faces
(As the sun does).
The sun (soul)
Will rise again

In the mist.
Softness will
Cut through
And embrace
the breaks
(Where pain seeps).

See you later

Marin Crockett

We both feel us slipping away
Just how our summer of plans turned into a gap
Of sorry I'm busy,
And I'm out of town,
Let's do something next Tuesday,
But it never came around.
Our last day at the beach
I do recall
The salt breeze across our faces and hair
Acting as if we do not care
That this is our last day forever.
I say I'll write to you and you say the same
We'll do small gestures for one another
And continue to play our little games
We don't say goodbye
instead we say we'll see each other later.
As I walk you to your car
Memories of us flood into my brain
As if they all just happened today.
We never say it, not once on the walk back.
But we both know it.
We are now strangers
that might casually see each other at Calahan's bar
Or
passing in the grocery store parking lot looking for
our cars.
Occasionally we'll run into each other when we're
both in town

And give each other a silent hello
Reminiscing on how we once stayed up late at night
watching the stars glisten, eating popcorn out of a
bowl.
But otherwise, I'll go on with my life and so will
you,
See you later feels just as brand new.

Danger in Dawn.

Graceyn Yonce

I awake from my slumber with
the intuitive sense of being watched.
The darkness of my bedroom
unravels before me, a breeze
sweeping past my open window.
A quiet tap causes me to turn.
A giant owl met my eyes,
The darkness that was once
her cover is no longer
a stranger to me (I can see).
I can see the yellow of the eyes,
the softness of the feathers,
the steadying of talons.
She watches over me
for a moment, turns,
and silently flies away.
(The night reminds me I am alone).
I hear her call in the distance,
A cry formed from the depths.
The darkness takes ahold of me
once again (I cannot see).
What danger awaits?
When will day break?
Fear (I know him well) lurks again,
outside of what I understand.
I close my eyes, feeling its weight.
Yellow, softness, steadying,
Steady.
Sunlight.

Throwing it all away for Ecstasy

Z

Fears turn into

Unnecessary realities

Collaborating with flaws only

Known by only those who poke and prod

Behaving was never an option

Understanding oneself seemed

Delusional

Despite it being essential

Instead I threw it all away for

Ecstasy and the knowledge that I belonged in

Someone's arms

**Letter I Received From a Friend On May 15,
2023 at 2:49 p.m.**

Tyler Johnson

Rest assured,

It's the calm before the ink strikes loose leaf.

That utopian, consumerist desk can't win against
the click of a pen.

It never will.

It's when the ego is shattered

All that what matters is if your idea
in the stanza resonates,

But you've spent more time perfecting that
font-esque handwriting that on its own
isn't worth reading.

A veneer of authenticity, took me a while to see
that's all I had to my name.

Too often to rely on a broken heart

It already beats on its own, no need to add on.

This shifts the responsibility to conjure greatness
from elusive beauty to your mind-
conquering
tragedies.

Afraid to even touch your joy,

Though it's not nearly as fragile as the crown
you willingly placed on the head of misery.

Bask in the roses before the thorns
wrap around your tongue

It pains me to speak of those memories now.

Don't take it too serious, there's always
another way they'll make it.
They'll see themselves in your personal revelations,
Sheep clothed swine gathering at the front of
pearly gates they don't understand the
significance of.
Nor can I, even with this plague of pretentious
embarrassment that keeps me amongst them.

Steering your thoughts based on material costs
won't amount to much.
Tearing apart your ethereal cross for the sake of
getting appreciated.
Studying the Whitmans, Ginsbergs, Frosts,
and Dickinsons
But lyrically equating to some corporate intern who
wrote on the back of some cereal box.
There's no avoiding that wrath of dissatisfaction,
so keep honing your written
encapsulation of self.
File the failures away, don't erase them like me.
I can't remember how I got here.

When the judges slash their red ink over the
paper you bled on,
And you lose faith and can no longer distinguish
their regulations from your own
beliefs...
Run.

They don't care for you, they just ring out your words

 'til you speak their sentence of compliance.

This isn't cowardly, there is no changing their intentions.

They are serenaded by an artist's groans,
They are parasites of the painter's loaded barrel brushes.

I fought them once,
 and left their arena with my beliefs
 on their knuckles, which was more than they
 deserved of me.

We're all wanting to get something out of these
 poems we write.

Whether it's prestige,
Acknowledgment,
Escapism,
Calamity,
Purpose,
Cleansing,
Distraction,
Finality,
Or new beginning.

The road to walk on is laced with reasons why we
 shouldn't be able to find what
 we're looking for.

But somehow, if we're lucky, we do.
I'm not a poet, just merely a romantic trying to cope.

There's no wisdom I have that's worth anyone's
time.

Just walk, sprint when needed.

I've been traipsing longer than I thought I would.

There's a colder gust coming through—

And if I knew I'd be on a path of such great length,

I would've brought my coat.

No turning back now.

The ink's running out.

I hope to see you when I get there.

Contributor Bios

Elizabeth Blanchard, 39, 53, 61, 65, 68, 73, 80

Elizabeth is a junior here at USCB. She is majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. Elizabeth loves to write poetry and draws inspiration mostly from nature, literature, and the intimacy of human connection.

Debi Boccanfuso, 13, 54

Debi is a retired educator who has always enjoyed writing. She is now enjoying the opportunity to participate in ENGL B222 this semester. She is excited to focus and grow in all aspects of creative writing. When she is not reading or writing, Debi enjoys spending time with her four grown children and two young grandsons along with a wide range of hobbies that seem to always make it into her stories.

Oriana Bolds, 21

Oriana is a senior Psychology and Biology major at USCB. She enjoys reading, designing, and baking. She has recently embraced the joy of writing again, attempting various styles as she works on her craft.

Evan Calabrese, 46, 74, 107

Evan is a Secondary Education English major in his junior year at USCB. He loves writing about the beauty of nature, reality, romance, and human psychology. He enjoys hikes, going to concerts, and is stoked to become an educator! He hopes that by participating in the discourse of poetry that he might inspire his future students to do the same!

Alex Clark, 10

Alex is a senior studying English Secondary Education and Theater. She is currently student teaching at Bluffton High and is excited to start her internship next semester. When she's not doing English major things like reading books, drinking coffee, and petting cats, she enjoys performing and directing at local theaters!

Jackson Cox, 5, 17, 35, 87, 91

Jackson is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing. He enjoys reading and writing, and although he prefers prose, has recently found a love of poetry. He plans to become a fiction author later in life after finishing his degree.

Marin Crockett, 32, 113

Marin is a sophomore English Secondary Education major at USCB. Marin spends most of her time reading, writing, and drinking coffee. As of lately, her writing has been inspired by her time exploring creative writing in ENGL B222.

Olivia Harrison, 37

Olivia is a freshman at USCB majoring in English with a concentration in Professional Writing. She loves coffee, cats, and meeting new people!

Tyler Johnson, 26, 90, 101, 117

Tyler is a Communication Studies major. He is neither here nor there, somewhere in between, searching for a ticket out of town, with a briefcase

he stole from the L.A. County Museum of Art that is filled with sorrows and newspaper cutouts of the great ol' West. The poems in this issue are the ones he left behind.

Mia Klinger, 70

Mia is a junior at USCB. She is a Psychology major and is Vice President of the Psychology Club. She is twenty years old and is originally from Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

Gracie Laseter, 18, 82, 104

Gracie is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Jen McCarty, 9, 86

Jen is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Sophia McKeehan, 12, 29, 81

Sophia is a senior in English with a concentration in Creative Writing, and will be graduating in the spring of 2024. She has an affinity for fountain pens, espresso, romantic literature, and spending time with her friends and family. She may attend grad school, she may not. But she will most definitely still be writing.

Chad Merritt, 52, 79, 84, 93, 109

Chad is a second-year English major at USCB. He serves as the Vice President of the Society of Creative Writers. Chad currently traverses themes connecting to the entwining conundrums of time

and narrative, his blanketing obsession with literature and philosophy, as well as his critical examination of the shortcomings in past and modern humanity.

A. Miller, 3, 15, 16, 57, 75

A. is a junior English Secondary Education major at USCB and a writing center tutor. You can find her in the upstairs library sipping a coffee with bat-shaped ice cubes in it and a stash of colored pens at the ready.

Traliya Mitchell, 50

Traliya Mitchell is a sophomore Psychology major at USCB.

Kagome N.Y., 1, 40, 77

The author is one who was drawn into the world of writing by its ability to connect the worlds of reality and fantasy and wishes to master the ways of wordplay to create worlds for all to enjoy.

Laura Payne, 58

Laura Payne is a junior Hospitality Management major at USCB with a minor in Professional Writing. She has thoroughly enjoyed her time in the Creative Writing courses offered in her college career. She enjoys watching television and listening to music in her free time, as well as working part-time at the Corner Perk on Hilton Head Island. As of late, her creative writing work has been inspired by Taylor Swift, whom she enjoys listening to immensely.

Lindsay Pettinicchi, 49

Lindsay Pettinicchi is a USCB Studio Art major. She is an award winning, exhibited and published photographer. She discovered photography while biking on Hilton Head Island with nature and wildlife all around her. HHI is certainly a nature and wildlife photographer's paradise. Moving targets are her most challenging subjects; her Tamron 150-600mm lens is her favorite. She also loves ceramics and the silkscreen printmaking technique.

A. Rackley, 96

A. is a sophomore here at USCB.

Lessle Rodriguez, 20, 72,

Lessle is a USCB student and a contributor to *The Pen*.

Kayla Sheriffe, 66

Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Kayla Sheriffe has come to USCB to expand her talent of writing as an English major. Her aspirations include becoming a children's book author and starting a podcast. Both will be geared towards promoting self-love and offering kind advice.

Anna Szalc, 99

Anna is a senior in the Studio Art Program. She enjoys combining disparate elements and exploring repetition found in nature. She plans to pursue her master's in Studio Art and hopefully work as a children's book illustrator.

Rebecca Taliaferro, 31, 33, 38, 42, 62

Rebecca is a sophomore English major at USCB, and has had a passion for writing poems and reading since she was little.

Hope Taylor, 7, 56, 92

Hope is a senior Psychology major at USCB and enjoys reading and writing poetry in her free time.

Katie Tovar, 8, 30, 44, 48, 59, 102

Katie is a senior in college (finally) with a passion for activism and writing. Her goal is to one day write a romance novel, and probably some horror too. She is so happy to be in college with so many great writing opportunities at school.

Graceyn Yonce, 6, 11, 63, 97, 100, 110, 115

Graceyn is a senior Psychology student with hopes of becoming a future researcher. When she isn't procrastinating writing her personal statements for graduate school, you can find her in a coffee shop with her pals or reading research articles. She enjoys photography, reading, and exploring new places.

Z, 27, 34, 47, 60, 69, 88, 105, 116

Z is a Psychology major and is in his senior year at USCB. He would like to dedicate his poetry to Dr. Malphrus and her poetry writing workshop. But more importantly, he would like to dedicate his work to the poetry co-op that he is a part of. He is grateful that they have taken him in as family.

About *The Pen*

The Pen is a five-time national award-winning literary journal sponsored by USCB's student-led organization, the Society of Creative Writers. It is produced under the English, Arts, & Interdisciplinary Studies department at the University of South Carolina Beaufort and is advised by Dr. Ellen Malphrus. This publication features creative works from students across all three of USCB's campuses. Accepted submissions include fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, music, and visual arts of all types. *The Pen* proudly showcases the creative works of its student and alum contributors, and *The Pen* Practicum (ENGL 211) serves as a credit-earning course for students from any major who wish to gain transferable skills and experience in the editing and publishing world.

About The Society of Creative Writers

The Society of Creative Writers is a student-led organization at the University of South Carolina Beaufort that meets weekly and sponsors the publication of *The Pen*, USCB's five-time national award-winning literary journal of creative writing and art. Our organization serves as a writing community for USCB's students of all majors. The Society of Creative Writers' mission is to provide a safe and nurturing place for students to share and discuss their work, as well as engage in writing activities to improve their skills and inspire them. For more information about meetings and events, please follow The Society of Creative Writers on Instagram (@scw_uscb). For additional comments, questions, or concerns, please email our editorial staff at ThePenUSCB@gmail.com.

Submissions Guidelines

To be considered for publication in *The Pen*, those who submit must either be a current USCB student or alum with no more than two years since their last active semester. Students from all majors are encouraged to submit their creative work. All work submitted must be original, unpublished, and preferably produced while at USCB. **Submissions are open year-round; please note that there are deadlines for each semester.** Work submitted after the deadline will result in consideration for the next semester. Creative writing, visual art, and music submissions will be considered. Fanfiction will not be accepted.

Submissions should be sent via email to ThePenUSCB@gmail.com in one Microsoft Word document; any other forms will not be accepted, including Google Docs or PDFs.

Multiple submission emails within a semester will not be accepted. Please review the following before submitting:

1. The subject line of your submission email must simply read “Pen Submission.”
2. The submitter’s name must be included in the name of the attached file.
3. Any work submitted must include a short author’s bio blurb exceeding no more than 100 words in the body of the submission email.

- Bio blurb example: Jane Doe is a junior psychology major at USCB, and has enjoyed her time in ENGL B222 this semester. She enjoys reading and writing poetry in her free time. As of late, her poetry has been inspired by her recent trip to Niagara Falls.
4. Formatting requirements:
 - Page breaks between each individually titled piece
 - 12-point font size
 - Times New Roman font.
 5. Ensure work is formatted as it is intended to appear on the page, and that any unconventional stylistic decisions that are intentional are made clear to *The Pen* staff via comments within the document.

For poetry, no more than seven pieces may be submitted per semester. Poems shouldn't exceed 66 characters per line. Character count includes spaces and punctuation.

For drama, no more than two pieces may be submitted per semester, and each piece shouldn't exceed 2,500 words per piece.

For prose, no more than five pieces may be submitted per semester, and each piece shouldn't exceed 2,000 words per piece.

Visual art must be sent within the same email submission as written submissions but not included in the same Microsoft Word document as written submissions. Each visual art submission must be sent within either a single JPG or PNG file, with images being no smaller than a 5" x 7" at 600 dpi. No more than ten pieces of visual art may be submitted per semester. Submitters must include their name in the title of each JPG or PNG file, with the title, medium (i.e., oil on canvas, charcoal on paper), and dimensions for each entry within their respective JPG or PNG file.

Music submissions should include an audio file, along with any accompanying lyrics or notes in a Microsoft Word document.

Submitted pieces go through a blind voting process—no one on the staff knows the identities attached to the pieces to make certain no voting bias takes place.

The text of *The Pen* is set in 12-point Times New Roman font, a typeface designed by Stanley Morison that first appeared in *The Times of London* newspaper in October of 1932. *The Pen* is perfect-bound and is printed by DX Print & Mail commercial printer located in Hilton Head, South Carolina. The print and color process is 4-Color Process (4 Color/ CMYK). The cover is Lynx 80-pound uncoated cover stock, and the body is Husky 60-pound uncoated stock. *The Pen* uses 30% post-consumer recycled content approved by the Forest Stewardship Council.

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